

REVIEWS

Adolph Reed, Jnr, *The South: Jim Crow and Its Afterlives*
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SEGREGATION'S SEQUITURS

Adolph Reed, now something of an elder statesman on the American intellectual left, has long argued for an understanding of race as a distinctly modern phenomenon, pushing back against essentialist notions in the process. Rejecting the idea that black people, within or outside of the United States, formed a single unified class, held together by communitarian notions of a shared culture, he has consistently argued that black politics cannot be understood in isolation from the broader currents of American society. Two landmark books, *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon* (1986) and *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought* (1997), took aim at twin icons of the movement, political and intellectual. In 1999, Reed published *Stirrings in the Jug*, an incisive analysis of the rise of a new class of black elected officials in the post-Civil Rights era. In 2010 he co-edited *Renewing Black Intellectual History* with the Chicago literary scholar, Kenneth Warren. Distinctively, Reed's writing has operated across two, often overlapping, registers. The first is that of the measured scholarly study; the second is popular polemic, in which Reed, a brilliant stylist, is capable of producing turns of phrase which combine in equal parts contempt for liberalism's sacred cows with savage playfulness. (On the aftermath of the sixties: 'Martin Luther King became a holiday and a postage stamp, a meal ticket for his widow and hobby for Stevie Wonder.') In both registers, Reed has pushed back against a rising tide of liberalism whose ideological assumptions about race much of the American left has implicitly accepted.

His latest book, *The South*, takes issue with the tendency to dehistoricize the experience of the region, seeing only ‘an unbroken arc of racial subordination’ from the era of slavery to the present. Allegories of a new Jim Crow are not only inadequate as analysis or explanation, Reed argues; they obscure the mechanisms that reproduce inequalities in the present. Striking a more personal tone than any of his earlier works, *The South* combines social history and memoir with the aim of describing the quotidian realities of the Jim Crow era and its aftermath. As he reflects, his age cohort is the last to have a living memory of what segregation meant in daily life. From this vantage point, he interrogates an ‘eerie sensation’ which often confronts him on visiting the new South. This is provoked by the discomfiting compatibility of, and his own oscillation between, two theoretically opposed positions: one which insists on a continuity between past and present and the other which denies it:

I was constantly struck by how much the way that things had changed in the region seemed to underscore the ways they hadn’t; and, vice versa, how the ways things haven’t changed underscore the ways they have. Going there was like travelling back in time, yet at the same time not.

Born in NYC in 1947, Reed was initially a semi-Southerner, visiting Louisiana relatives every summer as a small child, before moving to Arkansas with his family at the age of nine, then relocating to New Orleans, his mother’s hometown, for his teenage years. His mother, Clarita Macdonald, descended on her maternal side from the professional black Catholic middle class; her father was Cuban, from Oriente. Reed’s father, Reed Sr, was a Popular Front intellectual, a friend of CPUSA leader Ishmael Flory; born in the Arkansas Delta, he moved to Chicago, then New York, working for the American Labor Party, on which he wrote a PhD at NYU. (When asked about his path to Marxism, Reed Jnr replied, ‘I inherited the family business.’) After a few years in DC, Reed Snr took up a professorship at a black state college in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. His son would go on to spend most of the next quarter-century in Southern cities: after high school in New Orleans, Reed Jnr studied for his BA at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Here he was active in Black Power politics—but, as he put it in a 2015 *Platypus* interview, ‘always the guy on the Marxist edge of the discourse.’ His ‘delayed adolescent rebellion’ involved a flirtation with the Trotskyist SWP. Political militancy led to three years of organizing in the region, including working with anti-war GIs. Increasingly critical of the ‘Plekhanovite Marxism’ of the *maoisant* Pan-Africanist groups in New Orleans and Atlanta, he gravitated instead to the Western Marxist authors being published by the Monthly Review press: Karl Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy* and György Konrád and Iván Szelényi’s *The Intellectuals on the*

Road to Class Power left major impressions, as did Lukács, Adorno, Marcuse and, later, Habermas.

By the mid-seventies Reed thought it clear that ‘left forces had pretty much been outflanked, or had outflanked themselves, with respect to the evolving dynamics in black politics’; in North Carolina, ‘a real black bourgeoisie’ now dominated the movement. Reed returned to school at Atlanta University, the oldest historically black college in the US, where he would write a master’s dissertation on the political philosophy of Pan-Africanism—Du Bois, Garvey, Nkrumah, Padmore—and then a doctoral thesis on Du Bois’s ‘liberal collectivism’ and the effort to consolidate a black elite. This was completed in 1981, under the supervision of political scientist Alex Willingham. Here the thoroughgoing materialism that has characterized Reed’s later output was already on full display: Du Bois’s thought was firmly situated within the political context from which it emerged. Reed characterized Du Bois’s politics as a form of Fabian incrementalism, which saw ‘socialism’ as the gradual rationalization of industrial capitalism. (Reed’s reworking of this material for the 1997 book on Du Bois produced a study of the sociologist that has yet to be surpassed.) As a graduate student, Reed had first-hand experience of the emerging political black elite as he worked as a policy analyst and speechwriter for Maynard Jackson, the first black mayor of Atlanta. In 1977 Jackson would reward those who still held onto the idea of a unified black political movement by firing nearly 2,000 sanitation workers to put an end to a strike. Reed was also on the editorial board of *Telos* where he would publish some notable essays, including ‘Black Particularity Reconsidered’ in 1979, before being ‘dropped without notice’ by the journal as it began its long migration.

This was the political and biographical background to *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon*, whose subtitle, ‘The Crisis of Purpose in Afro-American Politics’, spelled out the stakes. Reed argued that Jackson’s bid for the 1984 Democratic nomination signalled a black political class fresh out of ideas. Rather than recognize the changing nature of black social life, the Jackson campaign attached itself to intellectually moribund and conservative cultural symbols, chief among them the church, an institution whose influence was overrated. Jackson, Reed argued, traded in a form of charisma that did not seek to formulate a programme through dialogue between members of an organized constituency. Instead, he relied on a reified notion of cultural homogeneity, justified by its purported morally uplifting effects:

If we assume the black population to be particularly susceptible to charismatic mobilization—if only because it is inherited and familiar—we must then ask whether responsible leadership should pander to an anti-rational, overly simple political style simply because it is driven by cultural inertia and is therefore convenient. Should not leadership—most of all leadership

that bases its claims on moral authority—strive to inspire constituents to transcend those of their practices and dispositions which undermine the democratic values of autonomy and open community and which leave them ill-equipped to face the challenges that confront them as citizens? How should we judge the claims of a putative leadership that, like market research-based television programming, deliberately offers nothing that might stimulate an unpredictable reaction in those who are led?

After Atlanta, Reed would go on to take up posts in political science at Yale, Northwestern, Illinois and the New School, before settling at the University of Pennsylvania. Not limiting himself to scholarship and critique, in 1991 he helped to found a new Labor Party—slogan: ‘The bosses have two parties, we need one of our own’—alongside Mark Dudzic and Tony Mazzocchi, leaders of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, to challenge the Clinton Democrats from the left. He has been a frequent commentator on US politics in the left press. Some of the finest examples are found in *Class Notes: Posing as Politics* (2000), which collects articles from the *Village Voice*, the *Nation*, the *Progressive* and elsewhere. One from 1996, on the uses of the idea of a homogeneous ‘black community’, sounded a prescient warning:

In Chicago, for instance, we’ve gotten a foretaste of the new breed of foundation-hatched black communitarian voices; one of them, a smooth Harvard lawyer with impeccable do-good credentials and vacuous-to-repressive neo-liberal politics, has won a state senate seat on a base mainly in the liberal foundation and development worlds. His fundamentally bootstrap line was softened by a patina of the rhetoric of authentic community, talk about meeting in kitchens, small-scale solutions to social problems, and the predictable elevation of process over program—the point where identity politics converges with old-fashioned middle-class reform in favoring form over substance. I suspect that his ilk is the wave of the future in US black politics here, as in Haiti and wherever the International Monetary Fund has sway. So far the black activist response hasn’t been up to the challenge. We have to do better.

The project of *The South* is of a piece with this trajectory. Reed wants to challenge a series of misconceptions about the Jim Crow era. The first is the liberal ‘post-racial’ view that celebrates the dismantling of segregation as the end of inequality as such. The second, a resurgent black-nationalist argument that the victory was trivial and the struggle against segregation misdirected, reflecting a demeaning presumption that black people needed a proximity to whites for their validation. A third is the idealist view that sees the South of the bad old days as an era when ‘bigots and bigotry reigned’, governed by bad ideas—rather than a coherent social order, maintained by specific interests. The ‘petty apartheid’ mechanisms of enforcement—separate entrances, water fountains, toilets—were never trivial to those who

endured them on a daily basis, *The South* argues, and ‘never less than massively inconvenient and humiliating.’ But they were always understood as the extrusions of a larger system that included denial of equal protection under the law and ‘the extremes of economic exploitation made possible by the elimination of citizenship rights.’

At the same time, Reed stresses the wide variations in the system across the region, according to geography and social class. The unwritten rules of behaviour in the big cities differed from those of smaller towns like Eudora, Fayetteville or Tallulah. Residential segregation took checkerboard form in the Hollygrove district of New Orleans, where the Reeds lived; sections of a block or sides of a street would be understood as white or black. A degree of interaction was permissible outdoors—mending a car, listening to a baseball match on the radio—but only on terms set by the white person. (Though far less common than white Southerners’ self-serving accounts would suggest, such exchanges were more frequent than a picture of the South as ‘a nightmare of unremitting degradation, driven by ubiquitous, universally wilful bigotry’ would allow, Reed writes.) By contrast, during his boyhood years in Pine Bluff, he recalls only ever seeing one white face.

Special instructions were needed for visitors to the region, as every town enforced ‘separate but equal’ in its own way and black people were always presumed to know the local etiquette. Mistakes could be deadly; fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was on a holiday visit from Chicago when he unknowingly violated the rules by responding in friendly fashion to a white woman storekeeper. Travel was fraught; driving—always by night—from Arkansas to New Orleans in the 1950s, Reed’s parents were ‘particularly anxious’ going through the small river towns in northern Louisiana, ‘treacherous hotbeds of white-supremacist militance’. Middle-class black people in the big cities were better able to create ‘buffers’ between their families and the most dangerous aspects of Jim Crow, but these could still be breached. A high-school friend, the son of a teacher, was sent to the notorious Angola Prison for a minor misdemeanour; within a year, he was dead.

Central to Reed’s analysis is the contention that the Southern segregationist order was not created and maintained as an expression of white-supremacist beliefs, however virulent those were. It was imposed by the planter-capitalist class as a reassertion of their rule after the defeats of Reconstruction and the Populist insurgency. Its aim was to enforce the harshest forms of economic exploitation, as much as racial inequality and black subordination; with dire outcomes for working-class whites in the region as well. Taking shape in the 1890s and 1900s, segregation was not systematically enforced as a social order until blacks—and poor whites—had been excluded from the political order by disenfranchisement and mass democracy suppressed. In retrospect, *The South* argues, the Jim Crow order

was unstable and short-lived; Reed's grandparents had grown up before it was fully consolidated in the 1910s. Almost immediately it was put under pressure by the Great Migration, New Deal trade unionism, World War Two; the socio-economic system it attempted to lock in place was undermined by patterns of migration, industrialization and black people who resisted it at every turn. By the time Reed encountered Jim Crow in the 1950s, it was already starting to fray. The myth of a timeless white Southern tradition that gave it the appearance of solidity had been 'installed at gunpoint' in the re-consolidation of ruling-class power.

Though the quotidian and personal form of the memoir inevitably foregrounds Reed's professional-class experience, *The South* is acutely aware that for the working-class majority, the Jim Crow order meant arbitrary, brutal labour discipline and extreme financial insecurity—'that was the point of the system, after all'—with no prospects of a better life. At school in Pine Bluff, the sharecroppers' children were 'distinct from the rest of us', clearly poorer, wearing hand-me-down clothes and out of school for months on end if there was planting or harvesting to be done. If the Southern black professional class could partially avoid demeaning situations, the labouring class was routinely subjected to 'unabashed racial domination' by white employers, although here too, Reed reports, black workers opposed expectations of deference, addressing the boss as 'Cap'—short for Captain—to avoid saying 'Sir', and using the same term for each other.

For middle-class blacks, the bestowal and denial of status represented the sharpest expression of Jim Crow at the everyday level. *The South* contends that they were more likely than labourers, domestics and sharecroppers to balk at being addressed by their first name by whites, with whom they were forbidden to adopt the same familiarity; this was due not to a greater consciousness of injustice, Reed argues, but to differential social realities. The Reeds could choose which department stores to patronize in order to avoid indignity and condescension; some allowed black people to try on hats but not shoes, some vice versa. In general they bought their menswear from a store with an agreeably polite Mexican manager. On the other hand, some pleasures—Reed has fond memories of a strawberry-soda—were tempting enough to 'screen out' the hateful Jim Crow context in which they were bought. His light-skinned grandmother could also be cajoled to buy beignets from a whites-only New Orleans *patisserie*, 'passing' as white. Discounting Hollywood histrionics about 'passing' as a form of existential crisis, Reed writes that in his experience it was purely pragmatic. The phenomenon also made possible a game of looking out for potential *passant blancs*, which Reed continues to play even though the stakes are now nonexistent. (In one mischievous passage he conjectures that Robin DiAngelo, author of the bestselling *White Fragility*, might herself be passing.)

Reed is not above reflecting on the interpersonal forms of microaggression, a constant theme of contemporary anti-racism. But even in turning to these moments of misrecognition, he attempts to connect them to some broader social structure. ‘Many white people’, he tells us, ‘simply and genuinely do not see us distinctly’—an observation evidenced by the fact that Sidney Poitier, Danny Glover and Chadwick Boseman have all been cast by Hollywood as Thurgood Marshall, despite bearing little resemblance to the Supreme Court judge (or to each other); by contrast, the likes of Lincoln, Churchill, Nixon or Hitler are cast with more fidelity. What is interesting is what this *aperçu* reveals about the psychology of America’s system of racial hierarchy: the attentiveness to differences whose recognition is a source of both negative and positive valuation.

The South treats the post-1965 flux in the region more impressionistically. Even after the adoption of the Voting Rights Act, black Southerners would find themselves uncertain of whether the old regime still persisted, despite its legal abolition. In Arkansas, months after the bill’s passing, Reed witnessed a bus driver instructing two black students at the front of the bus to make room for an elderly white couple, although there were plenty of other seats free; a tense stand-off ensued, before the driver backed down. Reed reflects ‘how easily the dozen or so of us on that bus could have disappeared that night.’ Within the maelstrom of anxiety and uncertainty that would follow the formal end of Jim Crow, he found himself in a world in which people did not know how to act or what to expect from one another. Driving across the region as a political organizer in the early 1970s, his experiences were mixed. Flagged down by a South Carolina state trooper one night for his ‘Boycott Gulf Oil’ bumper sticker, he found himself giving a roadside tutorial on the anti-colonial struggle in Lusophone Africa, staring down the barrel of the man’s gun; in an attempt at empathy, the trooper agreed that the A-rabs were giving ‘us’ a hard time.

Yet by the mid-70s, Reed was already seeing evidence that, while ‘folk notions of racial hierarchy lingered’, the Southern elites could adapt. The order through which class power in the region was reproduced was visibly evolving. The influx of Federal funds and advent of black elected officials were incentives for changed behaviour. Interviewing county officials in North Carolina on a grad-school summer job in 1974, Reed found them cordial and responsive, when dealing with black professionals like himself; but saw them relapse into the old patterns of ‘paternalism and deference’ in their interactions with local working-class blacks: ‘The shift was automatic and instantaneous, like code-switching.’ Several decades on, the full-blown emergence of the New South confirmed his intuition. Some hardcore white racism might remain, but it didn’t define the outlook of the property-owning and opinion-shaping strata, which did not oppose the interracial political

regime. In New Orleans, the governing class was seamlessly integrated, intimately linked with powerful black business interests.

Across the New South, one could now see symbolic and cultural expressions of racial inclusion. Civil Rights tourism was now a multibillion-dollar niche within the larger heritage industry. Segregation had been vanquished at the level of everyday life. Reed reports noticing that the tacit markers of those socialized into subordination under Jim Crow—the reflex to lower one’s eyes in the presence of a strange white person, for example—had vanished among the mixed crowd at a jazz festival, where blacks and other non-whites had gained access to that ‘realm of presumptive mastery’ once reserved for whites. Working and studying together as equals encouraged socializing together, in a way that would have been impossible in 1960. Echoes and vestiges of the old racial etiquette nevertheless remained, as ‘scar tissue’. The unsettling sense of continuity he experienced referred instead to the class dynamics of appropriation and distribution, superordination and powerlessness; the material interests driving policy remained ‘much as they were’. At its core, Reed argues, Jim Crow was a class system, rooted in relations of production and employment that ‘were imposed, stabilized, regulated and naturalized through a regime of white supremacist law, practice, custom, rhetoric and ideology’:

Defeating the white-supremacist regime was a tremendous victory for social justice and egalitarian interests. At the same time, that victory left the undergirding class system untouched. That is the source of the bizarre sensation I felt in the region a generation after the defeat of Jim Crow. The larger take-away from this reality is that a simple racism/anti-racism framework isn’t adequate for making sense of the segregation era, and it certainly isn’t up to the task of interpreting what has succeeded it or challenging the forms of inequality and injustice that persist.

Eloquently written, elegantly constructed, the political-historical argument of *The South* should constitute an important pole in contemporary debates on American politics as a whole. The book deals gracefully with the unstable category of the quotidian, which is by definition hard to pin down. Implied in it is a separation between a supposedly abstract theoretical or even folk notion of the world and another, unclearly related but experientially accessible, mirror. Since Reed has chosen the first person as his guide through history, the psychological and emotional harm of living under a white-supremacist order is brought to the fore far more than in his other writings—which, if read in isolation, might seem dismissive of personal experience. Yet memories here are always threaded to larger social patterns. Under the useful historical-emotional heading of ‘scar tissue’, he tells us that he still finds himself brought to fits of rage when confronted by white assertion of superiority over him. Or again, seated in the business class of

the Amtrak, he finds himself imagining a conductor ordering him to move from his seat. The composite parts of this anecdote—the class background implied and the indignation at not having this background recognized—are central to the way Reed understands the Jim Crow regime under which he was formed, as a system of asymmetrical social etiquette backed by the ever-present threat of violence.

With the dry gallows humour which characterizes his style throughout, Reed remarks in the book's opening passages that friends of his would often say they would worry for their sons if Jim Crow were ever to return because they would 'not know how to act'. But even in this seemingly dismissive remark there is a perceptive insight: knowing how to act also entails knowing how to disobey, and implied in Reed's comment is the intuition that perhaps a certain moral virtue of obstinacy and hostility to the social order may also have been lost in the transition. Indeed, left unclear in his demystifying account of Jim Crow and its afterlives is the question of how to understand racial politics given the transformations to black life since the end of the Jim Crow era. The approach favoured by Reed in *The South* does not seem to leave us much to build on in constructing a collective emancipatory racial politics, one of the core aims of American radicals in the post-war era. Seen from the perspective of Reed's later work, it is clear that this absence is not a deficiency. Rather, in *The South*, he takes as his starting point the incoherence of describing black people as a unified political class—a description at odds with the complexities of history.

Throughout his career, Reed has attempted to draw attention to a passive revolution in American politics that has ripped the symbols of radicalism away from an associated redistributive strategy. His is not, however, a story of co-optation or revolution betrayed. Rather, he has consistently shown how particular ideologies are expressions of the political, social and economic relations which predominate within a given society. This provides the theoretical framework within which *The South* operates. While essentializing ideas about race have become widespread, Reed is part of a constellation of US thinkers who have advanced a totalizing critique of this view. As well as the political scientist Cedric Johnson and Reed's son, the historian Touré Reed, this might include Barbara and Karen Fields, who have used classical sociology and anthropology to show that American race ideology must be understood as emerging out of the particularities of that nation's history, rather than a result of the transhistorical category of racism. In literary criticism, Kenneth Warren has historicized the concept of African-American literature, rejecting what he sees as its anachronistic employment by figures like Toni Morrison and arguing that its brief existence was in fact owed to the cultural constraints of the Jim Crow regime. In philosophy, Kwame Anthony Appiah has denied the idea that racial categories track onto

anything in reality, arguing that, on this basis, it is unhelpful to even use the concept to understand social phenomena. Walter Benn Michaels has advanced a trenchant critique of the politics of diversity and inclusion which he contends have served to legitimize capitalist inequality.

These diverse figures share an opposition to the tendency to posit the existence of racial categories as explanations for political or cultural phenomena. The novelty and radicalism of this approach becomes clear in comparison to the highly influential ideas of Stuart Hall. In contrast to Appiah, Hall argued in 'Race—The Sliding Signifier', a lecture from the 1970s, that 'ominous' appeals to 'reality' and the baselessness of racial concepts ignored the influence that the *discourse* of race, indifferent to reality, has had on politics and history across the globe. This move—that race might not be real, but racism is—has become something of a catechism on the left, repeated but rarely interrogated (if race is a response to racism, to what is racism a response?). What has set the intellectual tradition in which Reed works apart is that it has turned Hall's argument on its head: it is not so much that the realist is guilty of ignoring the reality of racism, rather the whole project of attempting to understand its effects does not amount to a genuine critique of racism—that is, it does not set out to ask what specific conditions and social forces have made the concept of race appear to exist. Consequently, the theorist engaged in the project of observing race as constructed by the discursive practice of racism gets trapped in the endless, and unfruitful, game of pointing out how a white-supremacist ideology informs particular practices.

Rather than getting bogged down in descriptive accounts of race, Reed has instead asked, why is it that we have come to ask the question of which form of ascriptive hierarchy is determining of inequality in the first place? The belief that the most unjust forms of inequality are those stemming from supposedly unchangeable ascribed hierarchies 'is both an accommodation to and expression of the triumph of neoliberalism', which precludes any discussion of the general social relations of power within society. The task must always be to understand how a particular regime of ascriptive hierarchy serves to legitimate a system of inequality. Reed shares with the Frankfurt School tradition a deep hostility not just to capitalist exploitation but to reified forms of self-understanding, incompatible with collective critical reflection. His critique of racial essentialism emerges out of the radicalization of the critique of positivism advanced most trenchantly by Habermas in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Its main consequence for Reed's own work was that notions such as 'the black community' cannot be presupposed as scientific concepts from which inferences about practical action necessarily follow. What Reed rejects in these terms is their reliance on organic and essentialist notions of the self, unresponsive to critical scrutiny—the critique he advanced against Jesse Jackson.

In 'Black Particularity Reconsidered', Reed observed that the newly forming post-civil rights black elite 'broadened its administrative control by accepting the inchoate black power agenda without criticism and instrumentally deploying it to gain leverage in regular political processes. Black control was by no means equivalent to popular democratization.' The black community on which this new racial politics depended could only be mobilized as a 'passive homogenous mass'. A more effective politics would need to recognize the complex class fissures of actually existing black American life. Clearly, *The South* is an attempt at exposing these fissures, challenging readers to hold this rugged image up against idealizations of black political life. Built into Reed's project seems to be a contradiction between two different standpoints, existential and historico-sociological. From the perspective of the latter, he seeks to push back against misconceptions about black political life and the South. Denying, as he has in his more theoretical work, the mass base of black nationalism, and historicizing the ideas of black intellectuals, he looks attentively at the record of actually existing black political leadership and observes the successes and failures of this class.

The motivation for producing this more complex image derives in part from the existential desire—a holdover from Reed's early Western Marxism?—to conceive of one's life and one's identity through concepts that are open to critical reflection. But opposed to this existential desire is the apparent need for the comfort of collective identities. Whether or not this is an affliction that affects the bourgeoisie more acutely, its existence is hard to deny. What should be done to challenge it? American history and politics since the second half of the twentieth century has moved in the opposite direction to Reed. Swimming against the current of progressive neoliberalism, Reed has shown the emphasis on racial and gender disparity as the sole criteria for assessing the justness of a particular regime for what it is: an accommodation to a form of capitalism no longer capable of guaranteeing even a modicum of equality.

Reed's perceptive critique of racial brokerage politics and the role it has played in consolidating a new regime of inequality aims to highlight the broader macro-economic and geopolitical forces that made this transformation possible. The postwar regime that he has called 'growth liberalism' was always structured around two axes: the abandonment of the core aims of the postwar social compact and a fanatical geopolitical pursuit of anti-communism, often at the expense of its domestic consequences. The first of these aims entailed credit-fueled homeownership and the acceptance of increasing consumption as the ultimate aim of politics. The second pole entailed an attempt to foster the development of nascent industries within countries in the developing world so as to stave off the threat of communism. This in turn helped to create the crisis of overproduction which would

undermine American industries once thought impervious to challenges by arrogant foreign-policy hawks. Within this context of diminished political ambition and economic decline, the politics of racial liberalism, which no longer sought equality but a more equitable distribution of poverty, was able to flourish.

Of course, none of this is unknown to Reed, who praised Judith Stein's magisterial *Running Steel, Running America* for providing a compelling explanation of the pathologies of American politics. But in the polemical mode, the emphasis on these broader structural forces can tend to fall out of the picture. The ongoing drifting away of actual politics from the traditional aims of socialism—rational management of society led by a hegemonic working class—perhaps explains the exasperation, always married to a sardonic humour, that has come to characterize Reed's work in recent years. Within a culture that has largely come to terms with a neoliberal political climate, Reed's ferocious hostility to liberalism should have the much-needed effect of arming his readers with a critique of America's dominant ideology. Here a fruitful comparison could be made between Reed's oeuvre and that of Adorno. For both, in a context in which successful political struggle seems hopeless, it may be a start at least to simply draw attention to the depths of the wounds inflicted by the enemy.